

Workshop opened with the Serenity Prayer.

Encouragement to sign up and share information with groups

Speaker 1:

I am a person of color and my journey transitioning is relatively new. Growing up in India I always felt different, always felt a wall between me. I felt different in my body and there was no frame of reference and I had to learn to hide who I am. The consequence of hiding who I am is that I am always living in fear and having to lie. Linked to alcoholism is feeling separate and not being true to myself - no matter how many people around me I am lonely. Being different does NOT mean that I have to be separate. But now I know it makes me me. My disease creates a sense of separation. Drinking dissolved that sense of separation, but accentuated my dishonesty. I went to gay bars but I wasn't gay. I became another person, who people liked. I became more of a guy: I tried to dress more normative and this led to more drinking. Felt different in AA - wasn't getting well. Boston to NY got sober in NY

When I stay in the triangle of the 3 legacies that's when my separation goes away
1st 5th step learned that racism is not my fault - I took on that problem that I was powerless over and felt shame and tried to change my clothes to be more white
When i moved to CA got thrown into GS - said i was available
2013 motion presented by transgender women for a transgender pamphlet
I had a huge emotional reaction and I asked for help from them and they took me to trans meetings.

I became an alternate for my friend and she had to drop out from being DCMC. HP brought me here because this is the best place to be transgender. Timing of submitting motion for transgender pamphlet.

Just saying yes - benefits come back to me.

I went to an AA potluck - not a meeting. I was sexually assaulted. I got a concussion. Now I know what people go through. Now I have real empathy. I still feel safe but because of this experience that I had, I know that this can happen to other women. This time I asked for help.

Sharing:

So many people who are minorities are coming to AA and it's not possible to know what would help them the most. I don't know if possible but maybe we could start with a survey:

- What should members be aware of not to make you feel unwelcome or excluded?
- What bothers you the most?
- What do you most want to change about groups that you don't think are being addressed?

- What are the most useful suggestions to make you feel more comfortable to attend meetings?

Relate to your share and am inspired.

I am white but had invited a black gay man to share and during the meeting members, white men, made faces and made noises and got up and left. And I'm not sure what to do. They don't have to listen. I was disgusted by their behavior. What can we do about that? Maybe more training? We need to talk more about what the definition of diversity and inclusion is. When I bring up safety issues I am told to leave and go to women's meetings. Inclusion means making it safe for everyone. So people making it unsafe shouldn't be welcome. I don't know what to do and hope we can do something to address this. I don't like when people get up and leave and make shitty faces.

I live in D04. I identify as a person with a disability. Access is love. I have been going to the area accessibility meeting since August. As a fat white sober mother of a queer black son and I use a mobility device - it makes a difference for a welcoming invitation. I went to the Sober and Free conference. The 1st thing I was able to do was to offer my device to help carry things in. Service helps me feel part of the fellowship. Willingness to talk about disruptions and intrusions in meetings. My home groups are online - intruders target queer women's meetings. What are the ways to address that proactively and informed group consciences? A recent share was from a sober black woman and felt like she could go to AA meetings where there were confederate flags. That the AA welcome was that strong.

21 yrs sober. I have targeted a few areas of inclusion, one is mental health issues. Ways people separate the us from them – don't take anything no matter what, or to change how you feel but if i don't i get into dark suicidal depression . I got into General Service and we got a pamphlet produced (P-11?) about AA members with mental health issues. We read from that pamphlet. Someone was told he wasn't sober because he was taking medication. My sponsor told me that practicing medicine without a license is a felony so tell them to shut the fuck up. Newcomers are welcome. Medications are outside issues.

I go to a meeting for trans and queer folk. We read from ch5 the definition we changed it to be gender inclusive. Having this upfront and by defining our terms in a welcoming way - we talk a lot when we introduce ourselves, we include our pronouns. Even in this group we get visitors who think it would be quaint to visit the lousy sober queer group. Some give their pronouns as "hehehe" - disrespectful . It's hard in the moment, hard to talk about even when they leave. It's hovering in the room and hard to address.

The book says grave and emotional disorders. A drug is defined as putting something in your body to change how you think or feel - its hypocritical for people to say that if they eat and drink.

2nd Speaker:

Sobriety date 9/3/2009

Not many that look like me in AA. I am paraplegic. Used a chair since I was 8 yrs old. I had used crutches but when I moved to CA from the east coast I needed a chair to keep up. I can count on my hands the number of physically disabled alcoholics I have met over the years.

It wasn't until I was asked to speak for this workshop that I really had to think about what it means to be a physically disabled alcoholic.

Being disabled is a widely defined term. I am not deterred by physical barriers. Generally speaking I am more nimble: I can just pop off a wheel if the door is too narrow.

Those having physical disability are a minority but as we age everyone will have mobility challenges. How can we be inclusive before we get to the point when we are physically unable to maneuver?

I don't like to stick out or ask for help. But I have had to in order to stay sober and when I need a meeting.

3 months ago my sponsor was speaking at the Alano club in San Jose, so I drove down. It was a late meeting at 9pm. I had never been - it's a Victorian house. I had to be carried up the steps. I don't like that feeling. I went to a meeting where a friend was speaking in Santa Clara. In the guide it said that it was wheelchair accessible. The ramp was 60 degrees and it was really hard to get up. I am in ok shape but I would have needed help if I was in a power wheelchair that would have been dangerous. I went to my 1st Unity Day this year. It was amazing. It was crowded. Like 400 people I couldn't move around. I had to stay by the General Service table because I couldn't get around. I couldn't go up to shake my friend's hand who was a speaker. I went to a Founders Day event - similarly it was dense and hard to get around.

General Service has changed my outlook on AA. Before, I just went to meetings. I never thought about anything outside my meeting. If it wasn't for General Service having been online or hybrid I couldn't participate. It's not easy going to a place like Eureka and finding accessible lodging. It's easier for me to attend online then deal with having to take my wheelchair apart several times. It's not perfect. We are trying to have equality at the area level. It is improving. I am grateful it exists. I don't attend online because I am lazy and just want to roll over from waking up. It has to do with access. I am going to go to Monterey in person for the next area assembly. I put the planning in to make it work and try it out. Our area is inclusive. I haven't left AA feeling worse. Last year I had some health challenges. In 2021/2022 I spent more time in hospitals and I physically couldn't get to meetings. The Hybrid set up provided access so I could participate and be of service. When I first heard about General Service I thought I couldn't participate.

I would like to see more accessibility committees. I looked through the accessibility workbook and there wasn't a chapter in there about working with physically disabled members which was surprising. I love AA. It's given me my life back. I am not the sharpest tool in the shed. I was so confused why everyone came up after my first time speaking and said thanks for your chair - I thought they were referring to my wheelchair. My sponsor helped me figure that out.

Shares:

I am here today because I am concerned. I wouldn't want my daughter to come to these rooms. I want to make AA safer. I was at Unity Day too, we need to work on that. Everyone is going to work on that.

I am sharing on behalf of someone who had to work today:

I don't think a lot of well meaning white folks realize something that keeps 'othering' people like me. I was surprised when a white person at a meeting told me I had an 'unusual' spelling of my name. I told them it's not unusual in India. There is some learning we all have to do. Myself included.

I feel gratitude. I have been in AA Since 1998/1999. When new I looked up to oldtimers and held them up on a pedestal . I was impressionable as a newcomer. Inside the meetings were spiritual but outside I saw blatant racial slurs and comments against immigrants that threw me off. Because they were an established old-timer I didn't know who to talk to. I was afraid to confront him. Not sure what is going on now in this workshop, is it just sharing? Or an outlet for where to go for issues? There should be regular workshops at regular times so we know we can go to the safety committee on this date to voice our concerns.

I am mentally and emotionally reeling a little bit. I am realizing there are multiple dimensions of barriers and I know as a straight ambulatory white dude I don't experience many of them. There is also a language barrier. We are addressing some of the antiquated language of the BB. I sometimes throw out fancy terms and the people who may need to hear it the most can't hear it. I am hearing we shouldn't be bystanders and we can lead by example. I couldn't act differently until I saw someone else act differently.

Cultural competence. I had to learn about it in my workplace. Hugging is an example. Hugs in other cultures are not comfortable for them or looking into people's eyes. What one person might think is normal in another culture isn't and is disrespectful.

Suggestion to have each meeting have a safety service role. That anyone in the meeting can take it to that person. We haven't defined it yet. But it is no longer a single person's problem but hopefully the group's problem. Leave peoples names out of it. I don't have to say mary lou said... we need to have ways to address issues that aren't inflammatory.

Speaker 3

DEI my mind shows me a picture of well dressed people in a conference room . I had to talk to my service sponsor. I felt intimidated by those words. I felt I didn't have anything to offer.

Having a business meeting before anything has happened to clearly define what the groups boundaries are. IF someone says something racist what do we do? When there are disruptions and there is tension, what do we do? At the beginning of our meetings we have all home group members raise your hands - these are the people invested. It's not just a free for all - we are together. Before anything disruptive happens.

A gentleman came to my homegroup - I have seen behavior where someone new has come either detoxing and mentally unstable - after 2-3 days in a row a member referred to that person when sharing. That person didn't know. The secretary cut that person off before their time during their share. That wasn't equal.

One person was agitated and incited others to act out - it caused harm by watching that person being treated like that. I need unity for my sobriety. I didn't do something that day, Be involved with Business meetings. If someone is singled out with only one interpretation they might get kicked out – spirit of participation is key. So I was able to give another perspective. I introduced and welcomed that person in a warm way. And I have done it everyday no one else has. I am a home group member. I go every day. They are seeing a home group member welcome and accept and engage with that person and this has helped dissolve the hostility. It kills me that we would treat someone like that. And it just took one person. But I can't always be that person.

We had a white woman speaker, and after a black man spoke, she said "Oh poor black man." He said no no no it's ok I raised my hand and said I need to acknowledge this is mentioned in the 5th radiation to make sure if a newcomer they knew this wasn't how the meeting was so they could come back. It's not just me. If anyone is being excluded it hurts me. We are all affected by it even if not sensitive to it. It is not only up to the person affected. It is up to all of us to always be welcoming.

Being a POC and going to in -person meetings for 1.5 years. I still struggle with it. When certain people come I feel less comfortable.

When I started online I thought don't raise your hand daily or space it out. It took a few inventories to see the deep seated beliefs. But I didn't feel that way about others. I have access to BIPOC and POC meetings. This conversation is becoming urgent – for prison I am the only POC doing H&I for prison meetings. Going to POC meetings was how I got my foot in AA. My sponsor told me to stay in a meeting so I am there for a POC even though I am uncomfortable.

Regular committee meetings can't enforce anything or kick anyone out. The intention is to get together and talk about it: it is a wonderful thing.

Shares

I like that you mentioned our primary purpose. I think we have an overemphasis on time and people with less time are looked down on or chronic relapsers. I have a restraining order against my ex and he came to the meeting. I called the police and men from the meeting came out to interfere with the police and mocked me about how much time I have. They said "I have 40 yrs you don't have anytime you are sick little girl." They don't know me and were mocking me for having less time than them. At the podium people say the newcomer is the most important person but that's not the reality. I don't want to introduce myself as a newcomer; it feels exclusionary.

I was very moved by the speaker about being a beacon for the person who is not here yet. When I have the opportunity to confront bigotry and racism in my 4th step to empower others to do that. Even clapping can be exclusionary. Clapping less for someone vs others. This workshop is allowing me to hear different experiences. I can get edgy if asked to go to certain men's group and be disturbing to them.

Inquiry: how can we keep AA for all types of newcomers? I was doing H&I at juvilane ahll most hispanic. Liked to hear about YPAA and passing books the kids couldn't read the books. I went to GS doug G was delegate at the time. WE talked about a plane language translation that ws 15 years ago. Wtoe letters to YPAA committees we didn't have bilingual interpretation. Then we go ta a bilingual program . create meeting in my living room for a bilingual meeign ita was a buatgul experience. When we see things that aren't inclusive we need to idendiy problem and solutions htat are long term solution.

Get involved. We start with a conversation but huge changes can start with a conversion.

I am appreciative of the 3 speakers and making themselves vulnerable. I am being reminded how many types of barriers there are. I am grateful we are addressing it. I love the business meeting to happen before an issue and to be able to talk about issues in a constructive and noninflammatory way. We need to be careful. We each have a lot of power to welcome newcomers. It is on us every meeting to reach our hands out.

Program of attraction. We lead by example. We all have different levels of sickness and it isn't about time. We act the way we want others to act. My perpetrator had a lot of time in the program. People are sick no matter how much time we have. We should not stay quiet when that happens. We can find strength together.

Part 2

Traditions are used to protect unsafe individuals.

Trad 3, 10 highlighted and excerpt from Safety in AA service piece SMF-209.

Shares:

How do issues around DEI relate directly to safety? DEI might make some people uncomfortable. Everyone agrees safety is important. How to tie together? Having words to connect them would be helpful.

This is such a constant daily struggle for people in my community it is hard to get the words out. I have so many thoughts. The transgender pamphlet. I heard a story about a lesbian many years ago who didn't want anyone in AA to know she was lesbian and she saw the pamphlet - she didn't grab it because she didn't want anyone to know but then she knew that she was allowed to be there.

The message is that everyone is welcome but I don't know if that means me too? It's also the messaging of the world. Equity - is equal access to resources. I am a GSR right now. Going to the assemblies costs money. My fellowship decided that we will fund the position for whoever is the GSR, so whoever is the GSR will be funded. They don't have to fundraise. That language and acknowledgement makes sure it is not up to a person to decide - no it's ok I have the

money, I can pay for it. No: we decided that the 7th tradition means we will fund the GSR. All the principles and language are here if we use it.

I am interested in connecting to people who want to work on accessibility. There is an organization for people who experience abuse - disabled people have higher incidence of abuse. I went to the NAATW Conference and did an accessibility workgroup. Have more opportunity for breakout groups by topic or affinity to have more opportunity.

Shouting and angry shares. I was curious about other people's input. When would a secretary say something? After? Another issue, maybe it's a thumper thing, but AA wisdom can be shared aggressively. Why is AA so white?

Not comfortable with DEI title. The terms are triggering. It is a reality. It creates a communication barrier. PI - how aa presents itself to the public. Where are we carrying message to? Are we going to the communities across town or just staying in my homegroup? Phsyologica safety - when someone shared their story that shared their own vulnerability it helped me feel i belong. I can't outsource my responsibility to a pamphlet i need to welcome everyone.

SMF-209 the 2021 version - many people involved in this discussion. The Diversity and Inclusion section was taken out from page 5 of the 2021 version.

I have been at a meeting where a fight almost broke out. I was new to the program and service. Two guys were really close to physical violence. Protecting the whole room that's an obvious safety issue.

Perhaps a parallel can be made from existing group behaviors using a commonly viewed sex crime as an example. Most have witnessed the crime and the secretary kicks out the perpetrator. I'm guessing that most members dismiss it and assume it's "not one of us". Like schools, AA meetings are open to essentially everyone, everyone with a desire to improve—safe environments for enrichment and growth. Indecent Exposure is a misdemeanor the first offense and repeated offenses are a felony in California causing the offender to be listed as a Registered Sex Offender. Much of the criminal sexual behavior linked to AA meetings is occult to our members, because it doesn't interrupt our AA experience. We might see vulgar or offensive behaviors and think, "well that messed up" and maybe add a little, "live and let live" to help relieve our inner turmoil. With the necessity of online meetings, we had images of other members' genitals right in our face during our regular meetings. What was our response? Commonly, the Secretary, serving the Group's Conscience, immediately removed the offending member from that meeting. At SNL, this was the case and unfortunately IMO, members were allowed to come join our meeting at 6pm, commit crimes in our meetings, come back at 8pm, and again commit crimes. Overt crimes, like masturbating during How it Works, as well as crimes perpetrated before the Serenity Prayer or after The Lord's Prayer harm our members and fellowship in various ways. Group's should protect our members from criminal behavior. I'm not suggesting we prohibit sex offenders from coming to our meetings. I'm saying that when crimes are being committed in our meeting and parking lots, such as displaying genitals to our others, that perpetrators continue to be removed from our meetings. Further, crimes should be

reported to local authorities. Zoom's Trust and Safety Team should be contacted in the cases of abuse on Zoom. They can block members from joining future meetings hosted by a Group. We should not tolerate lewd or unsafe behavior.

Lean on Tradition One for tense moments - group unity is more important than any one member so if I am not speaking up because of who that member is. Unity of meeting. So safety matters – physical altercations are obvious - the message is lifesaving but it is the same thing if someone comes in and doesn't see someone like them they need the lifesaving message. It might not be obvious but if they leave and don't hear the message it is a life and death matter.

Discussion Questions

51/50 fellowship meeting in my living room for the format we thought important to provide readings that educate newcomers that they are welcome everywhere in AA. Choose reading to educate the well-meaning but ill informed sponsor. We welcome professionals into our meeting to educate professionals. They didn't want to send people to AA because they would go off meds. Trad checklist trad 5 and 10 and we pull from other areas of literature. We read the long form of tradition 10 and checklist every week. Choosing which readings to read and format are important.

I have always witnessed exclusion. I was a little paranoid. A newcomer is looking to leave. I edited my shares and worried about being accepted. We need to make sure that AA feels safe. So I can divulge things about myself. I was part of transgender groups.

I witnessed exclusion. It was in a small room. I think it was an unhoused person, they sat down and had not bathed in some time and smelled like urine and everyone sitting within 15 feet of them moved and left this unkempt person. Everyone moved away. And the person was asked to leave. You are too unsanitary to be in this room. It saddened me. Is there a line that should be drawn in a circumstance like that?

A reminder to sign up and share information with groups.

Workshop closed with responsibility statement.

Notes taken by Amara on 10/14/23